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## **ANTHROPOLOGY SNIPPET-354**



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## **Tribal men climb trees to avoid COVID-19 jabs**



### **Only 7 persons could be vaccinated**

A group of men from a tribal settlement near Coimbatore climbed trees to avoid a team of health workers, who had approached them to administer COVID-19 vaccines on Friday. A few women, too, left the hamlet on the pretext of collecting water from a stream.

While the Health Department said the men climbed the trees due to vaccine hesitancy, tribal welfare activists felt the incident highlighted the poor reach of the healthcare system to the Adivasi community and the failure to create awareness among them.

## **Hid on treetops**

A few men from Sarkaraporathi tribal settlement hid on treetops when health workers from the Pooluvapatti Primary Health Centre visited the remote settlement, about 5 km away from the Forest Department check-post at Chadivayal.

The team, led by the medical officer of the Pooluvapatti Primary Health Centre, could vaccinate only seven persons in the settlement, sources said.

The team received a similar response from Adivasis of a few other tribal settlements in the region.

According to Deputy Director of Health Services S. Senthil Kumar, vaccine hesitancy was the reason for their reaction.

He said he would look into complaints that the health workers had not undertaken proactive interventions for providing healthcare to Adivasis in the region, and that they visited the settlements only for the vaccination drive.

“Rather than saying that Adivasis climbed trees due to fear of vaccination, the incident shows that our healthcare system has not yet reached Adivasis fully and earned their trust. The Health Department should ensure that Adivasis benefit from all healthcare interventions, and not the vaccination drive alone,” tribal welfare activist S. Thanraj said.

Echoing Mr. Thanraj’s view, J.M. Murugavel, of the South Indian Tribal Movement, alleged that a majority of the health workers were not making enough visits to remote settlements, and were yet to build a rapport with Adivasis, who lacked awareness on various health issues.

“Visiting the tribal hamlets’ vaccination and testing camps alone will not help the department in instilling confidence in the healthcare system among Adivasis,” he said.

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